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ABSTRACT

The original evaluation of Seattle Public Schools' 1983-84 Re-entry Program for suspended or expelled students was limited to student behavioral improvement observed during the course of the program. In an attempt to examine the program's long-term effects a follow-up evaluation was conducted which compared program participants and non-participants in three areas: (1) recividism rate after return to the regular school program; (2) academic progress; and (3) the return rate to the regular school program. Subjects were students in grades 7 through 12 who had been suspended or expelled (499 participated in the re-entry program and 518 did not). The results of the evaluation revealed that 77.2% of re-entry program participants returned to the regular program as opposed to 53.5% of non-participants. This difference in rate of return was statistically significant. The results also showed that re-entry program students made significantly greater academic progress after return to the regular program than did non-participants. The recividism rate for program participants (31.7%) who, after returning to school first semester 1984-85, were suspended, expelled, or dropped for nonattendance during that semester was not significantly different from that for non-participants (26.7%). These findings suggest that the re-entry program had a positive, long-term effect, but that effect was limited to students who overcame the difficulties associated with return to the regular school environment. (NB)

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# FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION OF A RE-ENTRY PROGRAM FOR SUSPENDED OR EXPELLED STUDENTS

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SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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# FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION OF A RE-ENTRY PROGRAM FOR SUSPENDED OR EXPELLED STUDENTS

## INTRODUCTION

The results of an evaluation of the 1983-84 Re-entry Program for suspended or expelled students were presented in Seattle Public Schools' Evaluation Office Report No. 84-13 (Ramey, 1984). The report describes students served by the Program, the Program's operation, and the Program's effectiveness in meeting certain student behavioral objectives. Since the Program was located at three sites that differed in their operation, the effectiveness evaluation compared the three sites for their relative success in achieving the Program objectives.

### Purposes of the Study

Assessment of the sites' relative success in meeting the Program objectives was limited to student behavioral improvement observed during the course of the Program. Remaining to be considered are the Program's longer term effects. Concern over such effects motivates the three questions addressed by the present study:

1. Is the recidivism rate after return to the regular program lower for Re-entry Program students than it is for suspended and expelled students who were not Program participants?

2. Is academic progress after return to the regular program greater for Re-entry Program students than it is for suspended and expelled students who were not Program participants?

3. Is the rate of return to the regular program higher for Re-entry Program students than it is for suspended and expelled students who were not Program participants?

Although not of primary interest, the return rate question will be considered first because of its logical precedence.

## Population

The population consists of those students in grades 7 through 12 who were suspended or expelled during the second semester 1983-84. The study compares two subpopulations: those students who enrolled in the Re-entry Program second semester 1983-84 and those who did not.

## Format

Results are presented in three sections corresponding to the three questions stated above. Major conclusions are stated in **boldface** at the beginning of each section, and are followed by supportive evidence and discussion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Return Rate

**The rate of return to the regular program is significantly higher for Re-entry Program students than it is for suspended and expelled students who were not Program participants.**

Table 1 gives the number and percent of Re-entry Program and nonprogram suspended or expelled students who returned to school first semester 1984-85.

Table 1

Return Rates

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Re-entry Program Students | 385 | 77.2 |
| Nonprogram Suspended/Expelled Students | 277 | 53.5 |

The entries in the percent column of Table 1 are return rates. A statistical test indicates that the return rate for Re-entry students is significantly higher than that for nonprogram suspended and expelled students.*

Unfortunately, the higher Re-entry Program return rate cannot, without additional information, be totally attributed to the Program. It may be due, at least in part, to characteristics of the Re-entry Program students themselves, characteristics which led the students to enroll in the Program in the first place. On the other hand, the Program's effect cannot

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* A t-test for comparing two proportions yields a value of $t = 6.41$, $p < .001$.

be totally discounted; at the least, it provides students, who are perhaps more highly motivated to remain in school, an option that minimizes the interruption in their schooling.

## Recidivism Rates

**The recidivism rate for Re-entry Program students is not significantly different from that for suspended and expelled students who were not Program participants.**

Table 2 gives the number and percent of Re-entry Program and nonprogram suspended and expelled students who, after returning to school first semester 1984-85, were suspended, expelled, or dropped for nonattendance during that semester.

Table 2

Recidivism Rates

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Re-entry Program Students | 122 | 31.7 |
| Nonprogram Suspended/Expelled Students | 74 | 26.7 |

The entries in the percent column of Table 2 are recidivism rates. A statistical test indicates that the recidivism rates for the two groups are not significantly different*; i.e., the likelihood of being again suspended or expelled after return to the regular school environment is no less for Re-entry Program students than it is for nonprogram suspended and expelled students.

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* A t-test for comparing two proportions yields a value of $t = .74$, $p > .10$.

Why does a substantial percentage of Re-entry Program students revert to inappropriate behavior upon return to the regular school environment after having demonstrated improvement while in the Program?* The most likely answer appears to be that those aspects of the Re-entry Program most influential in improving behavior may not be present in the regular program.

Interviews conducted with Re-entry Program staff and observations made in Program classrooms suggest that two aspects of the Program are largely responsible for its success in improving behavior. First, students are removed from former companions as well from peers and teachers whose expectations are colored by the students' own past behavior. Second, students' practice of positive behaviors and avoidance of negative behaviors is continuously supported and reinforced by staff trained in behavior modification techniques.

That the Re-entry Program's first salutary aspect, an environment free of former associates and expectations based on past behavior, is not encountered by the majority of students returning to the regular program is indicated in Evaluation Office Report No. 83-5 (Ramey, 1983). The report notes that, in 1982-83, over one-half (58.9%) of the students who completed the Re-entry Program returned to their previous school. Although these data were obtained two years ago, there is reason to believe that the practice of reassigning Re-entry Program students to their previous schools still prevails. During interviews conducted in 1983-84, several Re-entry Program teachers observed that their recommendations for placement in other than previous school were infrequently followed.

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* Re-entry program teacher ratings of behavioral improvement were only slightly lower for "recidivists" than for "nonrecidivists". (See the Appendix for the rating scales used. Seattle Public Schools' Report No. 84-13, cited in References, describes in detail the scales and the ratings obtained from them.)

In view of the potential benefit to Re-entry Program students, a revision of what appears to be current postprogram placement practice seems to be in order. Rather than more or less automatically assigning former Re-entry Program students to their previous school, the postprogram placement policy might become one of deliberate assignment to a different school, unless individual circumstances advise otherwise. Such a policy might also be applied with benefit to nonprogram suspended or expelled students upon their return to school.

The Re-entry Program's second salutary aspect, continuous involvement of students and trained staff in behavior modification activities, is not to be expected in the regular program, whose major function is instruction rather than behavior modification. Still, there does appear to be an instructionally nondisruptive way to incorporate behavior modification and reinforcement functions into the regular programming for returning Re-entry Program students. This way was suggested by the observation, made in Report No. 84-13, that the better attendance and greater liking for school noted at the Boren Re-entry site might be due to a greater sense of belonging and identification fostered by the site's small, self-contained structure. Such a structure might be incorporated into the larger, more anonymous regular school environment by creating special "homerooms" expressly for former Re-entry Program students. These homerooms, if staffed by appropriately trained teachers, could provide a continuation of the kind of behavioral support system characteristic of the Re-entry Program. The "homeroom" concept might also be applied with benefit to nonprogram suspended or expelled students upon their return to school.

## Academic Progress

**Re-entry Program students make significantly greater academic progress after return to the regular program than do suspended and expelled students who were not Program participants.**

Academic progress was assessed by comparing the number of credits earned as of the end of first semester 1984-85, after Re-entry and nonprogram suspended or expelled students returned to the regular program, with the

number earned as of the end of second semester 1983-84, the semester during which the suspension or expulsion occurred. Since information on number of credits earned is available only for high school students, the conclusion stated above may or may not apply to middle school students. Table 3 gives the mean and standard deviation of the number of credits earned as of the end of second semester 1983-84, the mean and standard deviation of the number of credits earned as of the end of first semester 1984-85, and the difference between the two means (the average gain in number of credits earned) for Re-entry Program and nonprogram students who remained in school throughout first semester 1984-85.

Table 3

Number of Credits Earned

| | As of End of Second Semester 1983-84 | | As of End of First Semester 1984-85 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Standard Deviation | Mean | Standard Deviation | Difference Between Means (Average Gain) | N |
| Re-entry Program Students | 15.4 | 15.5 | 19.7 | 15.7 | 4.3 | 225 |
| Nonprogram Suspended/ Expelled Students | 18.1 | 18.5 | 21.6 | 19.3 | 3.5 | 182 |

A statistical test indicates that the average gain in number of credits earned is significantly greater for Re-entry Program students than it is for nonprogram suspended and expelled students.*

This finding of greater academic progress for Re-entry Program students indicates that the Program has indeed a positive longer term impact. However, the finding of a substantial recidivism rate for the same student cohort suggests that the longer term benefit is limited--to those students who somehow overcome difficulties associated with return to the regular school environment. The recommendations of the preceding section, which suggest ways to ease the transition, are designed to enable more students to achieve the greater academic progress shown in Table 3.

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* A t-test applied to the transformed gain scores for the two groups yielded a value of $t = 2.11$, $p < .05$. The transformation took the form of separately standardizing (giving zero mean and unit variance to) the premeasure (number of credits earned as of the end of second semester 1983-84) and postmeasure (number of credits earned as of the end of first semester 1984-85) and then subtracting the former from the latter. This transformation, applied to gain scores, is recommended by Kenny (1975) to rule out a group differences (as opposed to treatment differences) explanation for results when the treatment (Re-entry Program) and control (nonprogram) groups are nonequivalent because they are self-selected.

## REFERENCES

Kenny, David A. (1975). A quasi-experimental approach to assessing treatment effects in the nonequivalent control group design. Psychological Bulletin, 82 (3), 345-362.

Ramey, Madelaine. (1984). Evaluation of the Seattle Public Schools' 1983-84 Re-entry Program. Seattle Public Schools' Evaluation Office Report No. 84-13.

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# APPENDIX

## TEACHER RATING OF STUDENT AT ENTRANCE

Student Name _____ Student I.D.# _____(1-7) Date _____ (8-13)

| | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Shows up for school. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (14) |
| 2. Is on time for class. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (15) |
| 3. Stays in his/her own space during class time. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (16) |
| 4. Obeys class limits or rules. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (17) |
| 5. Is boisterous, shows off in class. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (18) |
| 6. Listens to teacher without interrupting. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (19) |
| 7. Listens to other students without interrupting. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (20) |
| 8. Can concentrate on tasks for long periods. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (21) |
| 9. Is self-controlled during group discussions. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (22) |
| 10. Gets into fights. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (23) |
| 11. Is easily provoked by other class members. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (24) |
| 12. Resists others' efforts to reason with him/her. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (25) |
| 13. Deals rationally and reasonably with social-behavioral conflicts | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (26) |
| 14. Communicates his/her feelings in an appropriate manner. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (27) |
| 15. Has trouble expressing feelings appropriately. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (28) |
| 16. Is well behaved in class. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (29) |
| 17. Attempts to dominate or bully other students. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (30) |
| 18. Has difficulty keeping his/her mind on group discussions. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (31) |
| 19. Seems to like school. | ☐1 | ☐2 | ☐3 | ☐4 | ☐5 | (32) |

Please use the space below for any comments that may bear on your ratings.

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